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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KPAO](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: May 30, 2008

#### COALITION AGREES ON NEW PENSION MEASURES

¶1. The coalition partners SPOe and OeVP on Thursday agreed on changes to the state pension system following weeks of negotiations. A regulation will be extended until 2013 allowing persons to retire early, who have contributed to the pension scheme for long years, but have not yet reached the official early retirement age. The government has also tried to come to grips with changing demographics and longer life expectancy. Under certain conditions, the official retirement age could be raised, contributions raised or pension benefits lowered. Austrian media also report that as of 2013 the retirement age will most likely be raised gradually.

#### NEW COALITION FEUD OVER EUROFIGHTER JETS

¶2. The coalition partners SPOe and OeVP are once again at odds over the recent purchase of Eurofighter jets for the Austrian armed forces. The OeVP wants the SPOe Defense Minister Norbert Darabos to reveal the contents of a preliminary report by the Public Auditor's Office on the revised jet purchase contract. Darabos had claimed to have saved taxpayers a considerable amount of money by re-negotiating the contract for the planes. He told a parliamentary meeting he was bound by a confidentiality clause and would not respond to the OeVP call, which was also supported by the opposition parties, according to independent provincial daily *Salzburger Nachrichten*.

#### SPORTS EVENTS ARE LOGICAL TERRORIST TARGETS, EXPERT WARNS

¶3. In a PA-facilitated interview, US terrorism expert Peter Brookes discussed the potential threat of terrorist attacks during major sports events such as the Olympic Games or the European Soccer Championships with a leading Austrian daily. According to Brookes, "mass meetings and sports events are logical terrorism targets. There is a whole range of potential threats: There will always be people who want to use the publicity and attention of a major event for their own purposes. This secures them both money from people who support terrorism and new Jihad recruits. These dangers are real, which is why security experts are well advised to take the entire range of threats very seriously." The expert underscored that "in counter terrorism our two most dangerous opponents are terrorists and complacency." In a PAS-facilitated interview with centrist daily *Die Presse*, US terrorism expert Peter Brookes from the Heritage Foundation discussed the potential threat of terrorist attacks during major sports events such as the Olympic Games or the European Soccer Championships and warned against "complacency." The danger of

terrorism "continues to exist. I consider the Taliban in Afghanistan a regional group, which does not pose an immediate threat to the United States. Likewise, Al Qaeda in Iraq is a group that operates on a mostly regional level. The most severe threat undoubtedly comes from Al Qaeda in Pakistan," Brookes argued. Still, the expert dismissed the suggestion the US could deploy a sizeable contingent of soldiers to Pakistan: "We believe that Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al Zawahiri are in that country. But: We need Pakistan as an ally." The expert's major concern in this respect is that Pakistan "has nuclear weapons - between 50 and 150 nuclear warheads. What would happen, if this arsenal fell into the hands of radical Islamist groups?" The US intelligence services "assume that Al Qaeda will continue to attempt getting their hands on weapons of mass destruction." In addition to such potential threats, "there are other disturbing developments: A kind of auto-radicalization, where future terrorists are provided with something like a 'do-it-yourself terrorism manual' so they can become active in their respective countries of residence. That saves the groups the risk of having to get their people across borders in order to infiltrate target countries. These people do not need passports, they know their environment and they do not attract attention. The terrorist groups avoid taking risks by having replaced direct meetings with online-radicalization. In addition, we should not underestimate the influence of bin Laden or Al Zawahiri: They serve as inspiration rather than becoming active themselves."

#### PARALLEL OPERATION OF NABUCCO AND SOUTH-STREAM NOT DOABLE, US EXPERT SAYS

¶4. In a PAS-facilitated digital video conference on May 29, US and Eastern European experts discussed the issue of energy security. While US expert Zeyno Baran dismissed a parallel operation of Nabucco and other gas pipelines, the Nabucco initiators believe rising demands might make the implementation of several pipelines feasible. In a PAS-facilitated digital video conference on May 29, US and Eastern European experts, discussing energy security, underscored the significance of the Nabucco pipeline project. Zeyno Baran, a leading member of the Washington Hudson Institute told journalists Nabucco was particularly important because it would deliver natural gas to European markets outside of Russian control. According to Baran, a key challenge to Nabucco is the Russian plan for the so-called South-Stream pipeline, which would have virtually the same route and markets as its competitor. Baran does not believe both systems existing side by side would be doable. In contrast, the Nabucco initiators believe rising demands might make the implementation of several pipelines feasible, as Nabucco spokesperson Christian Dolezal pointed out. Baran, however, warned that Russia was "using the energy market as a political tool. That is why greater transparency regarding energy issues and countries' participation in pipeline projects is so vitally important," said Baran. Meanwhile, David Pumphrey, the deputy director of the Energy and National Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington warned that "rising oil prices are not a temporary phenomenon," and cited growing demands especially in countries like India and China.

#### SARKOZY IN VIENNA TODAY

¶5. French president Nicholas Sarkozy will pay a brief visit to Vienna today for talks with Austrian leaders. He is on a tour of European capitals before France takes over the rotating EU presidency in the second half of this year. Sarkozy will be formally welcomed by President Heinz Fischer and then meet with Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer. Before leaving the Austrian capital he'll be giving a press conference in the federal chancellery ORF online news reports.

#### PLASSNIK WELCOMES CLUSTER BOMB BAN

¶6. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik has welcomed agreement on a treaty to ban the use of cluster munitions, reached at a meeting of more than 100 nations in Dublin yesterday. Plassnik described the treaty as a "milestone" and the "most important disarmament move since the Ottawa Convention on Landmines." Austria has taken a leading role in the campaign to ban cluster bombs and

was one of the first countries to adopt legislation against the weapons.

Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik said she is pleased about an agreement reached in Dublin on banning cluster bombs, which she described as a "milestone in the development of human rights." Speaking to journalists on Thursday, Plassnik emphasized that "we were successful in our goal of a ban on all types of cluster bombs, which cause unacceptable harm to civilians." Austria's Defense Minister Norbert Darabos (SPOe) also welcomed the news, saying participants are "on the right track with the Dublin resolution." Austria has been pushing for a wide reaching ban on the weapons for some time. Thus, Plassnik explained in December 2007, Austria is "the first nation in the world to enact a total ban on cluster munitions without exceptions." The process to agree on a ban on the use, storage, and manufacture of the weapons was begun in Oslo in February 2007.

#### PRESSURE GROWING ON OLMERT

¶ 7. In Israel, a senior member of the Kadima Party of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has suggested that he step down because of the corruption allegations raised against him. Olmert denies any wrongdoing, but Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said the party should be prepared to replace their leader. She also suggested to "let the public decide on who will be the leader in order to rebuild the people's trust in the party." A recent survey has meanwhile revealed that more than two thirds of Israelis want their Prime Minister to resign, reports ORF radio early morning news in its Morgenjournal.

Kilner